



COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

Public Realm Framework



Government of the District of Columbia
Office of Planning
October 2004

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**Public
Realm
Framework**

Prepared for



Government of the District of Columbia
Office of Planning

Prepared by

Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership

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Introduction

Public Realm

The domain of the urban environment that belongs to the public community; the civic spaces and the streets.

This framework establishes a unified approach to the public realm in Columbia Heights. It recommends improvements to public streets, spaces and amenities; opportunities to strengthen the identity of the neighborhood; and the necessary actions to integrate new development.

Project Goals and Work Scope

The Project Work Scope spanned a seven month period from late March thru October, 2003. It has been organized around the following sequence of Phases, which give the structure for this document:

Phase 1 - Neighborhood Structure and Character

Understand the Cultural and Physical Background and Evolving History of the Columbia Heights Neighborhood

- Conduct and Document Physical Assessment of Neighborhood
- Conduct Stakeholder Interviews
- Define Goals, Issues and Strategies
- Define Program for Public Realm Improvements

Phase 2 – Public Realm Framework

Create an Urban Design Framework Plan for the Public Realm which defines a "design identity" for the public places and streetscapes that capture the unique qualities of Columbia Heights, and which integrate public space with private and public development.

- Develop and Define Public Realm Studies
- Develop Guideline and Technical Requirements for Public Improvements

Phase 3 – Implementation

Develop and Recommend Implementation Strategies for the Plan that coordinate public and private investment.

- Develop Cost Estimates for Construction and Installation of Improvements
- Develop Phasing Plan and Coordination Strategy
- Develop Strategies for Public Realm Management and Maintenance

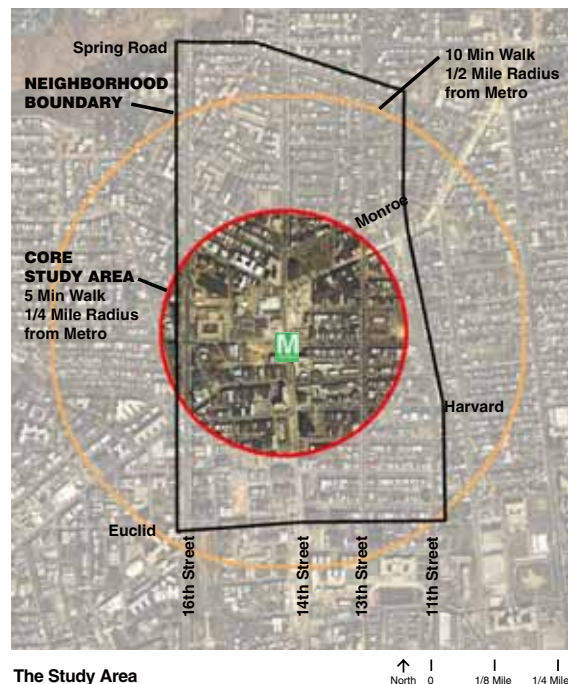
Planning Process

To create a plan which is embraced by the entire community, the Government of the District of Columbia actively engaged neighborhood residents and stakeholders in an open and integrated public discussion regarding community interests and needs.

The District Office of Planning (DC-OP) and the design consultants, Zimmer Gunsul Frasca (ZGF), with the assistance of Ward 1 ANC leaders, invited and formed an ad hoc Advisory Committee made up of fifteen residents and several ANC members. The committee provided generous guidance with respect to public outreach for the project and specifically with the conduct of three public workshops and a final public presentation. It further defined a Project Design Sub-Committee to work with DC-OP and ZGF, and met an additional five times to inform and advise the development of the Framework and the design of public space. Additionally, DC-OP and ZGF conducted many interviews with individual representatives and stakeholder entities, and held many meetings with private development interests for the RLA parcels. Project progress was reviewed in a series of meetings with DC-OP, District Department of Transportation (DDOT), National Capital Revitalization Corporation (NCRC), and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development (ODM-ED).

The Public Realm Framework process was conducted in conjunction with the Mount Pleasant and Columbia Heights Transportation Plan prepared under the auspices of DDOT and their consultants, Cambridge Systematics. The work plans, planning and design strategies, public workshops and final design proposals were coordinated to provide a joint set of recommendations to the District for the future development of the public infrastructure in Columbia Heights.

The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities issued a public offering to join the Design Team for the Framework Plan in the development of design proposals, with the objective that the process could lead to the award of one or more significant installations of Public Art in the Core Area of the Plan.



The Study Area



The Neighborhood's location within the District of Columbia

Columbia Heights is located in the heart of District Ward 1 and is surrounded by the neighborhoods of Mount Pleasant, Park View, Pleasant Plains, and Cardozo/Shaw. Its boundaries are Spring Road to the north, Euclid Avenue to the south, 16th Street to the west, and 11th Street to the east. The neighborhood's central corridor, 14th Street, is a traditional neighborhood commercial-retail street. The 'Core Study Area' is 1/4 mile radius, centered on the Metro stop at 14th and Irving Streets.

Consistent with the District's planning goals, the Framework has been developed according to the principles of Transit Oriented Development (T.O.D.). T.O.D. encourages a higher density and diversified complement of active street-level uses, in order to foster a high quality of cultural diversity and a greater vitality of public life.



14th Street Commercial Corridor, 1940s
Source: 1997 Community-Based Plan, WAF



The Neighborhood's identity is represented in its art

The Neighborhood

Background

In 1997, concerned residents and stakeholders in Columbia Heights participated in a series of community workshops to create a redevelopment strategy for the neighborhood called "A Community-Based Plan for the Columbia Heights Metro Station Area". The strategy identified and proposed redevelopment solutions for several major parcels, concentrating on the 14th Street commercial corridor. These solutions included:

- 'mixed-use' development in the neighborhood 'core area', along the 14th Street corridor, in relation to the development of the new Columbia Heights Metro Station,
- development of a new Civic Plaza on a publicly-owned parcel at the intersection of Park Road, Kenyon Street, and 14th Street,
- development of high quality public streetscape improvements along 14th Street, connecting to the new Metro station.

The strategy also established a list of 'Planning Principles' to guide and inform future development within the neighborhood.

Since the plan was completed, the Columbia Heights area has been the focus of a major neighborhood redevelopment effort by the District government and other public entities, including the National Capital Revitalization Corporation (NCRC), the RLA Revitalization Corporation (RLA), and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). In 1999, WMATA opened the Columbia Heights Metro Station. Since then, RLA and NCRC have been responsible for awarding redevelopment rights for many parcels within the Columbia Heights neighborhood 'core area', along the 14th Street corridor.

The DC Office of Planning (DC-OP) initiated this planning project in early 2003, to coordinate high quality 'Public Realm' improvements -- those within the public domain of civic space and public streetscape -- to foster a unified community identity for Columbia Heights.

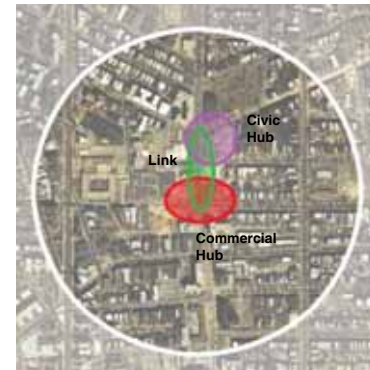
Planning Goals

The following 'Project Goals' were developed by DC-OP and the Design Team, endorsed by the Advisory Committee, and presented and adopted during the first community meeting.

- To understand the cultural and physical background and evolving history of the Columbia Heights Neighborhood.
- To create an urban design 'Framework Plan' for the Public Realm, to define public places and streetscapes, which integrate public space with private and public development.
- To create streetscapes which define a 'Community Design identity', which captures the unique qualities of Columbia Heights.
- To define design guidelines and design development documents for the Public Realm, consistent with the Planning Principles of the 1997 Community-Based Plan.
- To develop and recommend implementation strategies for the Plan, which coordinate public and private investment.



The location of Columbia Heights neighborhood within the District



A Community Based Plan for the Columbia Heights Metro Station Area, 1997



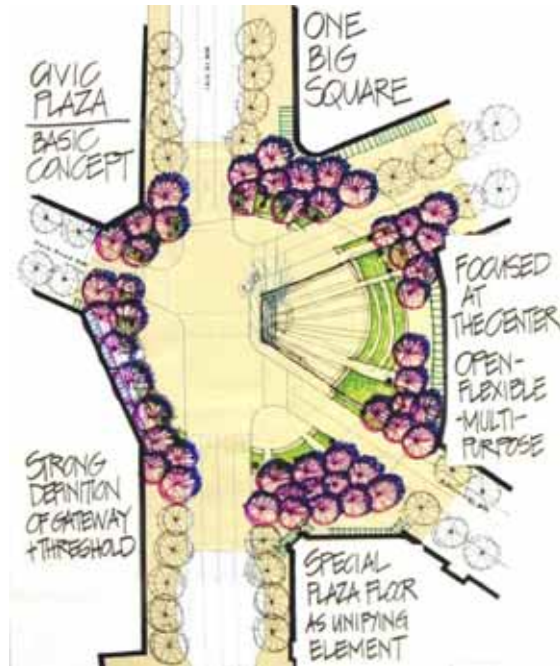
Redevelopment Activity
(RLARC Development Parcels identified in yellow)

Parcel Number	Project
• Parcel 24	Dance Institute
• Parcel 29	Tivoli Partners
• Parcel 27	DC USA
• Parcel 38	Civic Plaza Site
• Metro	Triangle, II
• Parcels 15 & 26	Columbia Heights Ventures
• Parcel 40	Urban League
• Parcel 5	NPCDC
• Parcel 19 & 32	Triangle, II
• Parcel 11	Duron, Inc.
• Parcel 20 & 34	In Progress

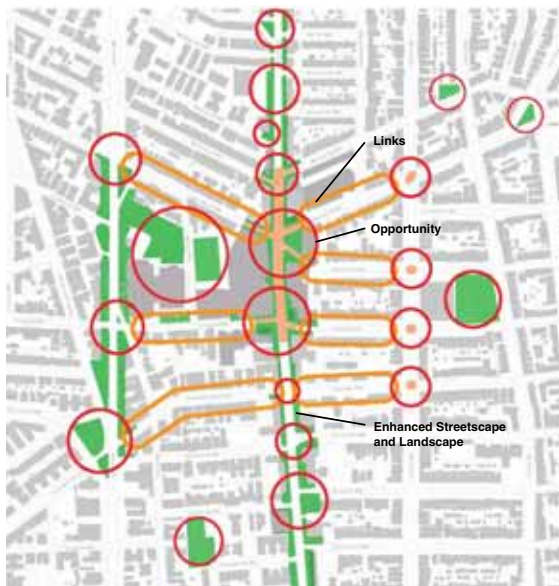
COLUMBIA HEIGHTS



The Framework Design Concept



The Civic Plaza Design Concept



Neighborhood Design Opportunities

Public Realm Framework Goals

The following goals guided the development of the Framework:

1. Strengthen Community Identity
2. Celebrate Diversity
3. Create a Lively Urban Experience
4. Make it Easy to Walk
5. Make Public Transit Convenient
6. Make it Safe.

Neighborhood Characteristics

Community residents identified the following:

- a commitment to embrace the extraordinary cultural and economic diversity,
- a sense of enthusiasm and vitality for the public realm,
- a spirit of openness and tolerance,
- an interest in promoting development which respects its past while looking forward to the future.

Design Concept

The Public Realm Framework Design Concept illustrates the urban design strategy for Columbia Heights. The Concept:

- focuses on the neighborhood "core area" -- the "Civic/Cultural" and "Commercial Heart" -- extending along 14th Street from Columbia Road to Monroe Street,
- creates a new Civic Plaza, at the intersection of Park Road, Kenyon Street and 14th Street,
- enhances the connection between the Civic Plaza, the Metro Station plazas and adjacent development,
- integrates public realm and private development,
- captures community identity,
- identifies a palette of materials which can be replicated in symbolic ways at several key intersections and gateways throughout the neighborhood.

1. Cultural multi-cultural humanity multi-generational 'kaleido-cultural'	multi-economic community oriented mix of faces neighborhood	melting-pot multi-ethnic familiar faces multi-lingual
2. Ambience / Atmospheric Vital sense of conflict urban uncut/raw chaos	'a lot going on' unrefined crowds vitality 'spike lee joint'	crossroads vibrancy edgy-tension density skyline
3. Social open colors accommodating flexible contrasts multi-generational	tolerance multi-purpose/use old/new accepting non-linear	'kaleidoscope' welcoming shapes diverse rooftops
4. Temporal / Changing changing emerging	evolving revival	history/historic 'renaissance'
5. Humanitarian soulful we/the people as 'art'	personal people-focused (not object-focused)	intimate

The words used by residents to describe their neighborhood



The stepped lawn will provide an opportunity to watch neighborhood activity



A flowering, ornamental tree will ring the plaza



The interactive fountain will provide a dynamic place for children to play and relief from summertime heat



The sculptural 'flowers' will provide shading and ornamental lighting

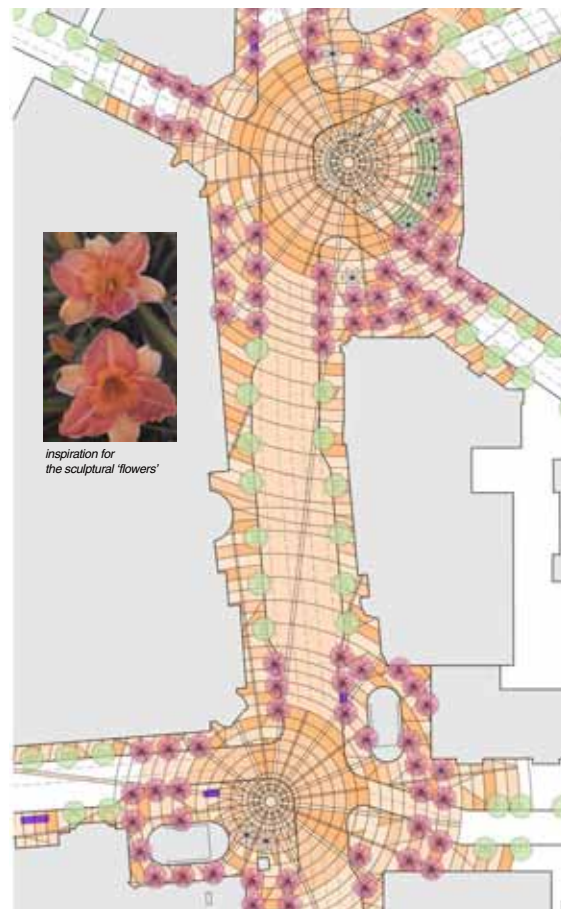


The Civic Plaza

The Design of the Civic Plaza and Metro Plazas

The Plaza is located in the triangular shaped parcel at the intersection of Kenyon St., Park Road, and 14th Street. It is approximately 12,000 square feet in area. The design theme is based upon a 'kaleidoscope' which symbolizes and embodies the rich diversity of the community.

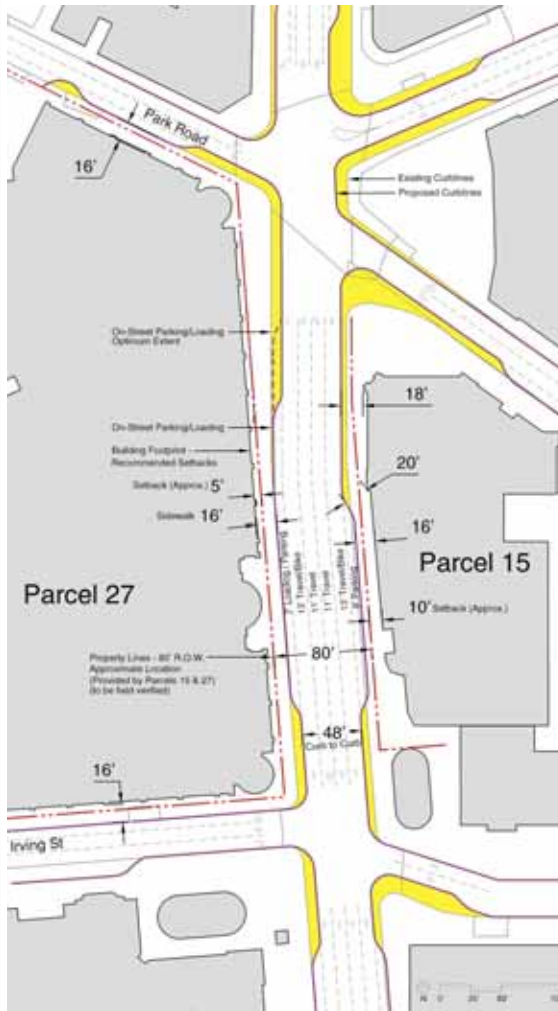
- The Plaza is organized around a strong geometric paving pattern, derived from overlaying a kaleidoscopic image upon a radial-concentric design which emanates from the center.
- The paving extends across the intersection, unifying the entire open space and new buildings, to create the sense of a much larger and cohesive public space. Thus, the plaza can comprise the small triangular park; or include the sidewalks across Kenyon St. and Park Road; or become the entire space encompassed in the pattern. Occasionally, streets may be closed and the entire space may be used to host community events. The triangular plaza can support 800 - 1000 people, while the entire, expanded plaza space can support up to 3,000 people for special community events.
- The Plaza is predominantly 'hardscaped' and is designed to be flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of uses.
- A special circle, thirty feet in diameter is located at the center of the Plaza. Here, the Plaza forms a shallow bowl and is depressed approximately 12 inches and surrounded by seat walls on three sides. Located within this circle is the primary feature of the Plaza – a public, interactive fountain with informally placed jets of water that may be programmed in a syncopated rhythm. The fountain symbolizes the spontaneity and vitality of the Columbia Heights neighborhood. It is also designed to have several 'phases of intensity', which facilitate diverse uses of the Plaza.
- The 'hardscape' is softened by the use of a terraced lawn -- a series of grassy steps which also provide an opportunity for seating and relaxation. The steps are five feet wide, terrace upwards away from the plaza center in low steps, and are framed in low concrete walls which function as seat walls to the adjacent sidewalk cafes.
- The entire edge of the Plaza is defined by planted rings of flowering ornamental trees which surround the east side of the lawn, and extend across Park Road, Kenyon Street and 14th Street.
- The edge of the Plaza is further defined by a ring of large-scale sculptural 'flowers', which provide shade canopies and ornamental lighting within the area of the lawn, and serve as formal 'signature' elements. These flowers are designed in the form of day lilies and constructed of metal 'stems' with 'petals' constructed of a tensile fabric over light-weight metal frames. The ring also extends across Park Road and Kenyon Street, where single flowers are located to mark those portions of the extended Plaza.
- The radial-concentric pattern extends down 14th Street to connect with the Metro Station entry plazas. A radial element from the Civic Plaza connects to a smaller second 'center' of the pattern at the Metro entries. The 14th St. / Irving St. intersection is also ringed with ornamental flowering trees to mark the gateway into the 'core area' from Metro-rail. Additional 'flower' elements also are placed at the Metro plazas to strengthen the relationship with the Civic Plaza.



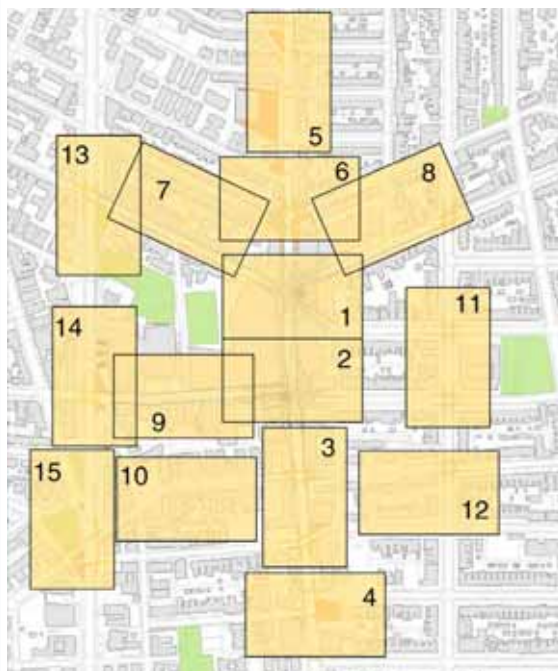
The unique paving pattern, together with the sculptural 'flowers', ornamental trees, and the integration of public art are intended to establish and reinforce a special civic place and community identity for the core of Columbia Heights.



The Metro Station Plazas



14th Street Right-of-Way: The areas in yellow identify curb extensions



Focus Area Design Plans



Traditional Lighting



Custom Bus Shelters

14th Street Right-of-Way Design

Within the 'core area', 14th street should be reconfigured to establish balanced access for all modes to and around the Metro Station entrances and to support traffic patterns which complement the neighborhood's commercial core. The reconfiguration of travel lanes will also provide a gradual transition from four travel lanes south of Irving Street to the existing two travel lanes north of the Monroe Street.

14th Street, between Irving Street and the Park/Kenyon intersection, should accommodate two 11 foot wide travel lanes in the center, two 14 foot wide combined travel-bike lanes at the outside, and on-street parking lanes along both sides of the street. This allows the connection of bike lanes to the Metro Plazas and on-street parking which reinforces the commercial uses along the street and enhances the pedestrian environment. Sidewalks must be a minimum 16 feet wide in the 'core area' to accommodate a relatively generous through-pedestrian zone and a furnishing zone along the curb. Door swings, cafe tables, and all utilities, should be held back from the 16 foot dimension. Where possible, a 20 foot wide sidewalk is recommended which would allow a four foot zone adjacent to the building to be used by the businesses to "enliven" their storefronts with tables or displays. Setbacks of adjacent properties may be required to provide the desired sidewalk widths.

Each of the intersections along 14th Street, from Monroe Street to Girard Street, should be reconfigured with generous curb extensions to enhance pedestrian safety and strengthen the public realm. The Transportation Study includes additional recommendations for improving pedestrian safety such as modifications to traffic signalization.

- The Monroe Street / 14th Street intersection should be reconfigured to provide better and safer access along Monroe across 14th Street.
- 14th Street from Monroe Street to Park Road should include two travel lanes, two dedicated bike lanes, and on-street parking lanes on both sides of the street. South-bound at Park Road, the parking lane converts to a dedicated right-turn lane.
- The Kenyon Street / Park Road / 14th Street intersection should be reconfigured to improve pedestrian safety. West-bound traffic at the Park Road / 14th Street intersection will permit a right-turn only northbound onto 14th Street. Kenyon Street will be reduced to two travel lanes at 14th Street.
- North-bound travel on 14th Street at the Park Road / Kenyon Street intersection will have a dedicated left-turn lane and one through travel lane which extends north to Monroe.
- The Irving Street / 14th Street intersection is also improved by narrowing the roadbed to provide a south-bound left turn lane and one through travel lane.

Focus Area Design Plans

The Focus Area Design Plans detail recommendations for specific areas throughout the neighborhood including special intersections and opportunity areas, street trees, lighting and sidewalks. The Plans are organized by priority. First priority areas include Plans 1 through 8. Second priority areas are Plans 9 through 12. Third priority areas are Plans 13 through 15.



High quality streetscapes and adjacent uses will enhance the pedestrian environment

Streetscape Design

The streetscape design for Columbia Heights is derived from the design of the core area. Streetscape elements include the three different scales of the standard DC ornamental street light poles placed at slightly more dense spacing in the core area to emphasize its importance.

Street trees along 14th Street will be London Plane or Linden trees, which have a slightly vertical form, and will provide a generous canopy for shading along the sidewalk through the commercial center of Columbia Heights. The plane trees will be placed at 40 foot intervals along 14th Street, within curbside planters filled with hearty ground-cover plantings and edged with DC standard iron hoops.

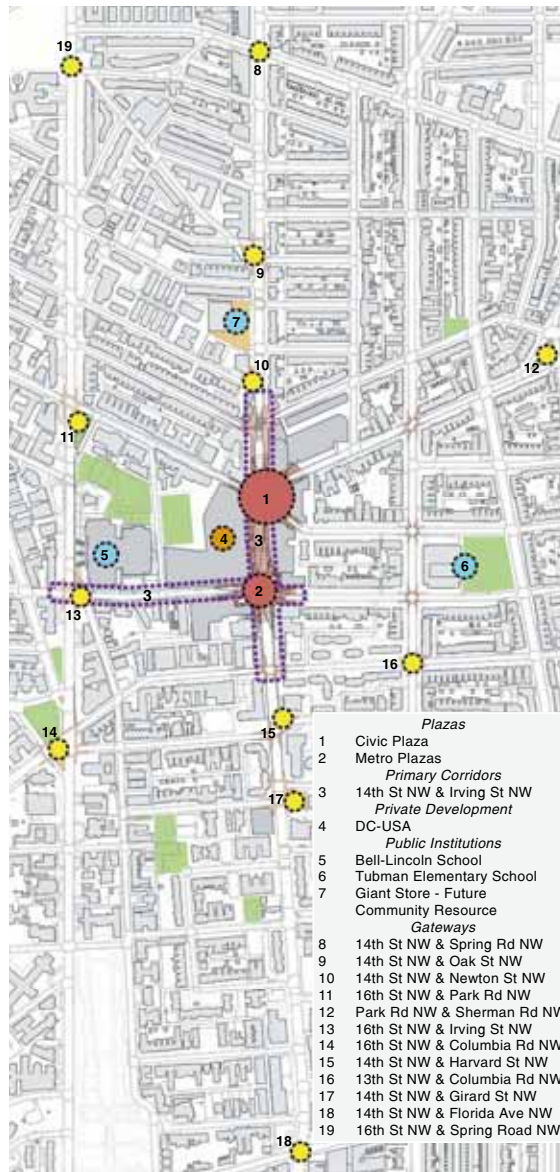
Within the core area, the sidewalks are proposed to be at least 16 feet in width to provide space for a generous pedestrian zone, and for a furnishing zone along the street edge for street trees, ornamental street lights, and occasional benches, planters and bus shelters.

Public Art Framework

The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities supported the selection of two artists to work with the Design Team on integrating public art concepts into the Public Realm. A public art framework was developed to identify opportunities in the community for public art installations. In addition, several conceptual plans for public art were created. These include: enhancements to paving and seating, custom designed street furnishings for lighting, shading and community history.



Potential Public Art Mosaics



The Public Art Framework



Potential Art Screens - Community Portraits and Masks



Preliminary Construction Budget Estimate Core Area Site Plan

Preliminary Construction Budget Estimates for Public Realm Elements

The construction costs for public realm improvements within the 'core area' have been developed in consultation with the DC Office of Planning, the District Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Works. They are based upon relevant construction costs for similar public right-of-way projects.

Construction costs for public improvements within the 'core area' are estimated at approximately \$6.0 to \$6.4 million. Consistent with conventional practice for costs planned at this stage of project development, these estimates include a 20% design/construction contingency.

The construction costs itemize the public right-of-way costs in relation to each adjoining development parcel, and are based upon area calculations for the right-of-way. Total project costs should be budgeted upon existing standard DC DDOT and DPW practices. Total project costs are estimated at \$7.2 to \$8 million, 20-25% higher than base construction costs.

Public Realm Phasing Projected Construction Schedule

Phasing Diagram LD	RLA Parcels	Project Name	2003				2004				2005				2006			
			Su	Fa	Wi	Sp	Su	Fa	Wi	Sp	Su	Fa	Wi	Sp	Su	Fa	Wi	Sp
Curbside Improvements Development Projects																		
A	29	Tivoli Theater								■	■	■						
B	Metro	Triangle II												■	■	■		
C	38	Civic Plaza												■	■	■		
D	15	Donatelli & Klein												■	■	■		
	26	Donatelli & Klein												■	■	■		
E	27	DC/USA															■	■
F	24	Dance Institute															■	■
Curbside Improvements - Adjacent to Existing Development																		
A1		Riggs									■	■	■					
D1		CVS													■	■	■	
F1		NE 14th St															■	■
Streetside Improvements - 14th Street NW																		
G1		14th / Monroe									■	■	■					
G2		14th / Park / Kenyon													■	■	■	
G3		14th Midblock													■	■	■	■
G4		14th / Irving													■	■	■	■
Improvements Adjacent to Core Area																		
H		Bell Lincoln School										■	■	■				
J		Irving St											■	■	■			
K		Park Road																
■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	Projected Building Construction Schedule																
Potential Public Realm Construction Period																		

■ ■ ■ Projected Building Construction Schedule
■ ■ ■ Potential Public Realm Construction Period

Financing and Funding

A coordinated funding and financing strategy must be agreed upon by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, the Office of Planning, the Department of Transportation, NCRC, WMATA, and the private development principals. This strategy should include, and leverage:

- coordination of public realm improvements with new development,
- coordination and phasing with planned and future capital improvements,
- creation of local improvement district and use of tax increment financing for infrastructure and public realm improvements,
- WMATA transit area improvement funds,
- additional capital allocations from the District of Columbia,
- coordination of DC Commission of Arts & Humanities artscape improvements.

Public Realm Management

Generally, the regular management and maintenance of curbside improvements within the 'public realm' is the responsibility of abutting private property owners. In complement, the Public Realm Framework recommends the formation of a Business Improvement District to oversee the management and maintenance of public improvements within the 14th Street 'core area' and improvements funded under the proposed Local Improvement District. This organization should evolve from current community associations and established Columbia Heights institutional interests and business community organizations such as CHAMPS, the Columbia Heights Development Task Force and a proposed Main Street organization.

Responsibilities of this body must conform to established District policy and be tailored to the proposed physical improvements of this Framework. Responsibility for management and maintenance of the Civic Plaza should fall under the auspices of this organization while ownership of the Plaza shall be retained by the District of Columbia. The stewardship of this Plaza should extend to the creation and management of public-authorized programs for special uses and activities, including the Columbia Heights Farmers Market and a variety of cultural and entertainment programs which should be planned and staged throughout the year.